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ABSTRACT

A study reports on the first 3 years of a 5-year study focusing on characteristics of educational practice that accompany student achievement in English language arts in middle and high schools. The study attempts to specify features of instruction that make a difference in student learning by comparing high-achieving and under-achieving schools which are otherwise similar. It involved 19 middle and high school English programs in Florida, New York, and California schools exhibiting diversity in population, educational problems, and approaches to improvement, and it was organized as a nested case design with the program as a case and the class including teachers and students, as cases within. Findings suggest higher achieving schools are characterized by instructional programs in which: (1) skills and knowledge are taught in multiple types of lessons; (2) tests are deconstructed to inform curriculum and instruction; (3) within curriculum and instruction, connections are made across content and structure to ensure coherence; (4) strategies for thinking and doing are emphasized; (5) generative learning is encouraged; and (6) classrooms are organized to foster collaboration and cogitation. Contains 9 tables and 36 references. Appendixes describe schools involved in the study and list related reports. (EF)

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CELA RESEARCH REPORT

BEATING THE ODDS: TEACHING MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO READ AND WRITE WELL

JUDITH A. LANGER

CELA RESEARCH REPORT NUMBER 12014

NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER ON

ENGLISH LEARNING & ACHIEVEMENT

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TEACHING MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO READ AND WRITE WELL

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J.A.L.

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The Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA) is a national research and development center located at the University at Albany, State University of New York, in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Additional research is conducted at the Universities of Georgia and Washington.

The Center, established in 1987, initially focused on the teaching and learning of literature. In March 1996, the Center expanded its focus to include the teaching and learning of English, both as a subject in its own right and as it is learned in other content areas. CELA's work is sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, as part of the National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment.

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BEATING THE ODDS:
TEACHING MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO READ AND WRITE WELL

JUDITH A. LANGER

INTRODUCTION

This is a report of the first three years of a five-year study focusing on characteristics of educational practice that accompany student achievement in English. English classrooms have long been considered places where "high literacy" (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987) is learned, where students gain not merely the basic literacy skills to get by, but also the content knowledge, ways of structuring ideas, and ways of communicating with others that are considered the "marks" of an educated person (Graff, 1987). In order to distinguish this kind of literacy from the more popular notion of literacy as a set of "basic" reading and writing skills, in this report I use the term "high literacy" in an everyday sense to refer to the literacy gained from a well-developed middle and high school English curriculum. Certainly basic reading and writing skills are included in high literacy, but it also includes the ability to use language, content, and reasoning in ways that are appropriate for particular situations and disciplines. Students learn to "read" the social meanings, the rules and structures, and the linguistic and cognitive routines to make things work in the real world of English language use, and that knowledge becomes available as options when they confront new situations. This notion of high literacy refers to a deeper knowledge of the ways in which reading, writing, language, and content work together in effective ways.

Such literacy, I contend, belongs at the heart of the teaching and learning of English across the grades, but it is often masked when the curriculum is viewed as a loose amalgam of separate study of writing, reading, literature, oral language, rhetoric, and grammar. These separate foci often obscure rather than clarify the goals of English teaching, diverting attention away from the situated activities in which they co-occur. Yet, when the focus is totally on larger activities, how can the underlying knowledge and skills be highlighted so that students learn to use them independently in life's situations? In today's public as well as educational arena, concerns focus

not merely on test scores but on approaches to curriculum and instruction, the teaching of skills and knowledge, and the professional as well as classroom contexts that support them: basic problems of practice that have been the focus of previous waves of reform. The problems become particularly acute at times when schools are called upon to reform their programs, since effective reform requires a clear vision of the kinds of learnings that are sought and the kinds of approaches most likely to achieve them.

The lack of such a vision is one of the central problems English educators (indeed all educators) are facing today. Reforms compete with one another for attention, and professionals are faced with changing views of appropriate goals in a changing society (Myers, 1996). Yet amidst the debates, many districts and teachers are already educating their students very successfully, providing contexts for the development of high literacy for diverse populations. My Excellence in English research project recognizes the deeply contextualized nature of both teaching and learning (Dyson, 1993; Myers, 1996; Turner, 1993) and therefore examines the contexts that shape teachers' professional lives, the contexts they create within their classrooms, and the contexts for the use of English language and literature that students learn to master.

Bakhtin (1981), in his conceptualization of dialogic thinking and the multivocal nature of language and thought, offers us a way to think about high literacy and its development. Rather than seeing it as comprised of independent skills or proficiencies that are called upon at needed moments, he offers us a vision in which the educated individual calls upon a multi-layered history of experiences with language and content, cutting across many contexts – assuming that multiple and sometimes competing voices (or ways of interpreting) add richness and depth to emerging ideas. For example, he argues that the discourse of a nation includes an awareness of the special experiences and rhetorics of many subgroups; we recognize and respond differently, he says, to the characteristic prose of doctors, lawyers, or clergy, ways of communication and interpretation that stand in dialogue with one another rather than being reconciled into a single "common" discourse. Such diverse voices also occur both within and across classrooms and subject areas (Applebee, 1996), as students bring the voices of their out-of-school experiences as well as the conversations within their particular academic courses to bear on the topic at hand. Students are enculturated to understand and use these voices (or perspectives) across the grades; their growing proficiency is shaped by the interactions that are fostered in the classrooms in which they participate. Beginning from such a perspective, in my series of studies at CELA I

have been trying to learn more about the features of English instruction that seem to make a difference in students' learning of English and high literacy.

THE STUDY

The Excellence in English study examines educational practices in middle and high schools that have been trying to increase students' learning and performance in English language arts. In particular it focuses on schools whose students are also beating the odds on standardized tests, that is, whose students are performing higher on statewide "high stakes" exams than are students in comparable schools. My research team and I wanted to understand why – to specify the features of instruction that make a difference in student learning and to contrast those schools where test scores are higher with demographically comparable schools in which they are not. We asked the following research question: What are the features of English instruction enacted in both kinds of settings, schools where students score higher and those where they do not, when the schools are otherwise comparable?

Our work is anchored in a sociocognitive perspective (particularly Bakhtin, 1981, and Vygotsky, 1987; see Langer 1986, 1995). It contends that learning is influenced by the values, experiences, and actions that exist within the larger environment. Students' and teachers' voices and experiences, learned within the primary and secondary communities to which they belong, make a contribution to what gets learned and how. It is largely from these diverse contexts that notions of what counts as appropriate knowledge and effective communication gain their meaning. The problem of instructional focus, of what counts as learning, becomes particularly acute at times when schools are called upon to change their programs, since effective change requires a vision of the kinds of learnings that are sought and the kinds of approaches most likely to achieve them. In an earlier paper (Langer, 1999) I reported on how teachers' professional lives support student achievement. Building from that work, the present paper will present the features of English instruction that support student learning, the kinds of attention given to helping students gain both knowledge and skills in English. These features, which emerged from the contrasts among the schools we studied, will take us into the middle of some of the current debates about the nature of effective literacy instruction. We have been studying these features in

order to better understand the various components that make a difference in helping students become more highly literate.

Project Sites and Participants

To identify the sites we would eventually study, we solicited recommendations from university and school communities in four states: Florida, New York, California, and Texas. The states were chosen to include diversity in student populations, educational problems, and approaches to improvement. The schools were nominated by at least three independent sources as places where professionals were working in interesting ways to improve test scores. We checked all test data reported on each state education department's web site to identify a) those schools that were scoring higher than schools with similar student bodies and b) those schools that were scoring more typically, more like demographically similar schools. Because we were particularly interested in identifying features of excellence in urban schools, we wished to more heavily sample schools and districts serving poor and culturally diverse students. However, because we also wanted to identify features that marked excellent programs across demographic areas, several suburban and urban fringe schools were also identified. We visited the most promising programs based on a combination of recommendations and test scores, and from these made a final selection based on the teachers' and administrators' willingness to work with us over a two-year period as well as the school's ability to contribute to the overall diversity in student populations, problems, and locations in our sample. In the end, we selected 25 schools and 44 teachers to participate in the study, and focused on one class for each of the teachers. We have been studying both the professional and classroom activities that contribute to the English instruction that students experience.

This paper reports on the first three years of the project, during which time we studied 19 English programs in Florida, New York, and California. (Texas has recently been added.) Ten of the 19 participating schools are places where students are beating the odds, performing better on state administered high stakes tests than schools rated as comparable by statewide criteria. The other nine schools are places where administrators are concerned and most individual teachers

are trying hard to have their students learn, but the school scores are more typical of other schools with similar demographics.

Types of schools

The Florida sample included schools from the Miami-Dade County area, representing a very diverse student population. The Dade County School District has long been involved in cutting edge efforts to improve education in English, including in part: Pacesetter (sponsored by the College Board), the Zelda Glazer/Dade County Writing Project, the education of all teachers in the education of non-native English speaking students, the creation of interdisciplinary teams, and the early development of school-based management. The New York sample encompassed a large geographic area, with populations ranging from rural to suburban, middle class to urban poor. It included a number of districts in New York City and the Hudson Valley region that have earned reputations for student-centered and response-based English education, an emphasis on writing and reading across the curriculum, implementation of Goals 2000, and taking an interdisciplinary approach to math, science and real-world studies through the English language arts. Two programs we studied (at King Middle School and International High School) focus on high academic competence for English Language Learners. The California sample included schools from the Los Angeles area, a region with a very diverse student population, that has long been a bell-wether for educational innovation and change in English language arts designed to benefit all students. Most recently, in an effort to raise student performance on statewide assessments, a new curriculum, an end to social promotion, a requirement for schools to adopt one of several reform programs, school accountability for student achievement (with schools placed on probation for failure to increase scores), and extra funds for tutoring efforts were put into place. Summary information about the schools is presented in Table 1. A further brief description of each school is presented in Appendix 1.

Table 1. School Demographics

School	Student Membership	% Free or Reduced Lunch	Selected Features
Florida			
+Reuben Dario Middle School*	83% Hispanic 12% African American 4% White	80%	team and decision making councils; reading and language arts across areas
+Highland Oaks Middle School*	47% White 23% African American 27% Hispanic	34%	interdisciplinary teams; academic wheels; collaborative partnerships
Palm Middle School	60% African American 39% Hispanic 1% White	85%	Media Arts Magnet; tracking; interdisciplinary teams
Hendricks High School	56% Hispanic 43% African American	47%	International Business and Finance Magnet; Jr. ROTC; dropout prevention
Miami Edison High School*	92% African American 8% Hispanic	38%	new academies; teams; writing and English in subject areas
+Wm. H. Turner Technical Arts High School*	63% African American 33% Hispanic 4% White	45%	dual academic and work related academies; workplace experience; Coalition of Essential Schools
New York			
+Henry O. Hudson Middle School	92% White 4% African American	5%	interdisciplinary teams; active departments
Stockton Middle School	62% White 23% African American 14% Hispanic 1% Asian	76%	interdisciplinary teams; departments
+Abraham S. King Middle School	33% Hispanic 21% African American 43% White	40%	interdisciplinary teams; active departments; dual language program
Crestwood Middle School	66% White 25% African American 5% Asian 4% Hispanic	62%	interdisciplinary teams; departments
+International High School*	48 countries 37 languages	84%	academic teams; internships; portfolios; exhibitions
New Westford High School	68% White 22% African American 6% Hispanic 4% Asian	36%	departments; grade level teams; arts focus
Tawasentha High School	97% White	12%	curriculum teams; facilitators

Table 1. School Demographics (Continued)

School	Student Membership	% Free or Reduced Lunch	Selected Features
California			
Rita Dove Middle School	58% Hispanic 41% African American	72%	literacy coaching; Health Science Career Magnet; district wide reform initiative
·Charles Drew Middle School	55% Hispanic 32% White 8% African American 4% Asian	57%	literacy coaching; Strategic Reading Program; district wide reform initiative
James A. Foshay Learning Center** ·Foshay Middle School* ·Foshay High School*	69% Hispanic 31% African American	86%	USC pre-college enrichment; New American School; Urban Learning Center; academies; district wide reform initiative
Rutherford B. Hayes High School	86% Hispanic 7% Asian 3% Filipino 2% White 2% African American	74%	Humanitas program; teams; Math/Science Magnet; service learning
·Springfield High School	63% Hispanic 15% White 10% African American 9% Asian	26%	Foreign Language/ International Studies Magnet; UCLA; Career Ed; Bilingual Business/Finance Academy; district wide reform initiative

Each school's racial/ethnic composition is described using the terminology supplied by the school and/or district.

· Denotes schools whose scores on state assessments were above those of demographically comparable schools

* Denotes participants' preference to use real names. In such cases, the actual names of schools, project teachers, and their colleagues are used. For the schools not marked with an asterisk, pseudonyms are used throughout this paper.

** We studied both the middle and high school programs at Foshay Learning Center.

As can be seen in Table 1, schools with poor and diverse student populations predominate in the study. In terms of representation, the schools range from a 92 percent African American student body and no White students in one school, to 86 percent Hispanic and 2 percent White students in another, to 97 percent White students in another, with the other schools populated by students of greater ethnic and racial diversity. The schools also differ in the amount of student poverty, with school records indicating from 86 percent of the student body to 5 percent of the student body eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Participants

We worked closely with one or two teachers at each school (one class each), as well as other teachers and administrators with whom they co-planned, co-taught or were otherwise engaged (including teams, departments, and other working groups) in the planning and review as well as implementation of instruction. Although we studied each teacher's entire class, six students from each class, representing the range of performance in that class as judged by the teacher, acted as informants, collecting all their work and meeting with us to discuss that work, their classroom activities, and what they were learning.

The study design allowed us to examine the teachers within the context of their teams, departments, and districts. Over the years in which we worked in the schools, we came to understand the extent to which the teachers were affected by the larger context in terms of professional growth or malaise, or were achieving unusually good results in spite of the context in which they worked. This led us, eventually, to recognize three broad but distinct patterns within our sample of teachers: 1) exemplary teachers whose work was sustained, perhaps even created, by the supportive district and/or school context; 2) exemplary teachers in more typical schools who achieved their success due to professional contexts unrelated to the school and/or district (often through participation in professional organizations such as local affiliates of the National Council of Teachers of English, the International Reading Association, and writing projects, and collaboration with local colleges and universities); and 3) teachers who were more typical, who did not beat the odds, who were dedicated to their students but working within a system of traditions and expectations that did not lift them beyond the accomplishments of other comparable schools.

In the first category above – beating the odds teachers within beating the odds schools – we found that these unusual teachers were **not** unusual within the contexts in which they worked; that is; their school and/or district (often both) encouraged all teachers, not just those in our study, to achieve comparable professional goals, and our observations of department meetings and interviews with supervisors and administrators suggested that the instructional approaches of the teachers in our study were widely accepted and carried out in their schools. In working with the second category of teachers – beating the odds in more typical schools – we found that they did not work in contexts that provided students and teachers with consistent and strong

curriculum and instructional approaches and development. Thus, while their students may have scored higher than those in other classes in the school, there was no consistent and strong support that sustained student achievement beyond their individual classrooms. We found the third category of teachers – typical teachers in typical schools – in departments and schools that did not support their individual growth and that lacked collective consensus about the most effective approaches to educating their particular student body. Table 2 (see page 10) provides a quick summary of the schools and teachers in the study.

Design

This study involved a nested case design with the program as a case and the class including the teachers and student informants, as cases within. This design permits shifting lenses among the three contexts (program, teacher, and students) as ideas for instructional change and delivery are considered, discussed, and enacted. Field researchers worked with each program, following the teachers' professional as well as classroom activities and interactions, including their interactions with central office staff, to develop an understanding of their roles in instruction. The field researchers – Paola Bonissone, Carla Confer, Gladys Cruz, Ester Helmar-Salasoo, Sally Kahr, Tanya Manning, Eija Rougle, Steven Ostrowski, and Anita Stevens – each studied one or more programs for two years; hence we were able to study the instructional concerns, plans, and enactments over time, with two sets of students. The sample thus far has involved two years each with 32 teachers working in 19 schools, and includes some 960 students and 192 student informants.

None of the schools we studied were dysfunctional, and none of the teachers were considered to be other than good. Ten of the 19 schools were considered to be performing better than schools serving demographically similar populations, based on recommendation and test scores, and the teachers in the other schools in which we worked were recommended by district administrators as successful although the overall performance of their schools was more typical. Thus, this is a study of instruction within both higher performing and more typically performing English language arts programs. Our findings are being further tested in six additional schools in Texas.

Table 2. Project Schools and Key Teachers

School	Teacher	Category
Florida		
Reuben Dario Middle School*	Karis MacDonnell	1
	Gail Slatko	1
Highland Oaks Middle School*	Rita Gold	1
	Susan Gropper	1
Palm Middle School	Nessa Jones	3
Hendricks High School	Elba Rosales	3
	Carol McGuiness	3
Miami Edison High School*	Shawn DeNight	2
	Kathy Humphrey	2
Wm. H. Turner Technical Arts High School*	Chris Kirchner	1
	Janas Masztal	1
New York		
Henry O. Hudson Middle School	Cathy Starr	1
	Gloria Rosso	1
Stockton Middle School	Helen Ross	3
Abraham S. King Middle School	Pedro Mendez	1
	Donald Silvers	1
Crestwood Middle School	Monica Matthews	3
International High School*	Marsha Slater	1
	Aaron Listhaus	1
New Westford High School	Elaine Dinardi	3
	Jack Foley	3
Tawasentha High School	Margaret Weiss	2
	Nicole Scott	3
California		
Rita Dove Middle School	Jonathan Luther	3
	Evangeline Turner	2
Charles Drew Middle School	Alicia Alliston	1
	Tawanda Richardson	1
James A. Foshay Learning Center Middle School*	Kathryn McFadden-Midby	1
James A. Foshay Learning Center High School*	Myra LeBendig	1
Rutherford B. Hayes High School	Ron Soja	3
Springfield High School	Celeste Rotondi	1
	Suzanna Matton	1

1 denotes beating the odds teacher in beating the odds school
2 denotes beating the odds teacher in typically performing school
3 denotes typical teacher in typically performing school

* denotes participants' preference to use real names. In such cases, the actual names of schools, project teachers, and their colleagues are used. For the schools not marked with an asterisk, pseudonyms are used throughout this paper.

Procedures

Data-gathering in both the professional (see Langer 1999) and school communities occurred simultaneously, permitting constant comparison among perceptions, plans, and actions from the participants' and observers' perspectives, both at the moment and over time. Each field researcher spent approximately five weeks per year at each site including a week at the beginning of each year to interview district personnel as well as teachers and students about their goals, plans, and perceptions; to make initial observations of the classes we would be studying; and to plan for the year ahead. This was followed by two weeks per semester to observe classes, to conduct informal interviews with participating teachers and students, and to shadow the teachers in their professional encounters (i.e., team, department, building, district, and other relevant meetings).

We set up e-mail accounts or spoke by phone or in person in order to maintain weekly contact with teachers and students, during which time we discussed professional and classroom experiences, including student work. Portfolios were also maintained and student work was mailed weekly, for use in the discussions.

Data

Data consisted of field notes of all meetings, observed classes, and conversations; e-mail messages; artifacts from school and professional experiences; tape recordings; and transcripts of all interviews and observed class sessions; as well as all in-process case reports. Three types of collaborations contributed to the data: full project team, collaborative dyads, and case study sessions.

Full-project team. In addition to meetings with the teacher participants in each state, the teachers and research team interacted in ongoing e-mail discussions about the approaches, activities, and progress in the participating classes and the teacher's experiences in creating improvement.

Collaborative dyad. Each teacher and field researcher communicated on e-mail approximately once a week to develop, discuss and reflect on the teacher's professional interactions as well as class sessions and student performance.

Case study sessions. The field researchers and I met weekly for case study sessions. During these meetings, the field researchers presented in-process case study reports about the professional networks and instructional activities and offerings at their sites. These sessions offered opportunities for case-related patterns to be discussed, tested, and refined, and for cross-case patterns to be noted for further recursive testing and analysis.

Coding

Coding for this project was used to organize and index the various types of data in ways that permitted us to locate the participants' focus on key areas of concern. For example, where possible, all data were initially coded for the type of community the participants were focusing on or referring to: professional, classroom, or social, as well as for their focus on instruction, curriculum, and assessment. More targeted codes for particular types of knowledge, skills and processes were also coded. This scheme served as an indexing system that allowed us to later retrieve and more carefully analyze data from one categorical subsection of the data pool, compare it with another, and generate data-driven sub-categories for later analysis.

Analyses

Data were analyzed by a system of constant comparison, where patterns were identified and tested both within and across cases. One level of data analysis was ongoing, focusing primarily on instructional approaches and the professional experiences that informed them. These led to the identification of the following six features as prominent in important ways: approaches to the teaching of skills, approaches to test preparation, connecting learnings, enabling strategies, conceptions of learning, and classroom organization. After data were coded for these categories, we then returned to each instance to qualitatively analyze the conditions under which each existed: this in turn led us to identify the features that differentiated the approaches of the three

groups of teachers. Thus, the various data sets were keyed to the individual teacher and classroom, providing multiple views of each instructional context, permitting both in-depth case studies and cross-case perspectives to be developed. In each case, we have triangulated the data, drawing on various aspects of the professional and classroom communities for evidence.

While the findings are limited to the 32 teachers we've studied to date, the study required the field researchers to shadow and gather data about the teachers, their colleagues, and their school's English language arts programs as the teachers interacted with others at team, departmental and other meetings, and workshops, and as they planned and sometimes co-taught with their colleagues. The field researchers also interviewed the teachers and administrators with whom the participating teachers interacted in order to understand the larger professional and instructional context of each. Thus, although the focus was on one or two teachers in each school, we were able to gain more first-hand "living" knowledge of each school's English program, including the professional context of the school and district. Since the teachers participating in the study differed from each other in a variety of ways, it is likely the other teachers were not necessarily similar to those we studied. However, the key teachers were selected because of schoolwide scores in literacy, and we analyzed data not only in the classroom, but in the professional contexts that provided insights into the larger contexts of English instruction.

In previous studies of effective literature instruction (Langer, 1995), we found that successful instruction was characterized by its adherence to certain underlying principles rather than by any uniformity from teacher to teacher in specific activities or pedagogical routines. The present study thus assumed that currently popular approaches to English and literacy instruction (e.g., process writing instruction, response-based literature instruction, attention to grammar and mechanics) will be realized in multiple ways by different teachers and students. The notion is related to Sternberg and Horvath's (1995) argument that expert teaching should be viewed in terms of a prototype that allows for considerable variation in the profiles of individual experts, except that our "prototypes" are construed as features within the instructional environment rather than the psychological characteristics (insight, efficiency) that Sternberg and Horvath propose. Thus, the analyses and findings of this study do not focus on the content and form of instruction, but rather the underlying features that hold across effective contexts of implementation.

FINDINGS

What are we learning from these disparate situations? As readily becomes evident in the brief description of the various high performing schools (Table 1, Appendix 1), each has its own distinctive emphasis, but all are significantly marked by active and engaged students and teachers in academically rich classrooms. Time and again, we were impressed by the enthusiasm, knowledge and dedication of the teachers and by the collaborative participation of the students in quality, "minds-on" activities. Students were well behaved and remarkably on task almost all the time. Each school has managed to create an effective learning environment in which students have opportunities to think with, about, and through English, both as a vehicle for getting things done and as an object of study in its own right. The students in these schools were learning a great deal about high literacy and the functions and uses of language. They were gaining knowledge and skill in English, even though the ways in which this occurred differed considerably from class to class. The students were learning how language works in context and how to use it to advantage for specific purposes. They were learning grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and organizational structure – sometimes in context but also with carefully planned activities that focus directly on the structure and use of language. We observed a great deal of writing, reading, and oral language as students explored their understandings, prepared presentations, and polished final products. Students in the high performing schools were beating the odds, as evidenced by higher test scores than in comparable schools.

Findings indicate that although the schools felt and looked different, and were organized very differently, certain noteworthy features surrounded their students' experiences with English; these features permeated the environments and provided marked distinctions between higher and more typically performing schools. In each of the six sections below, I discuss an issue that is a problem within the field of English language arts instruction, then I relate one of our findings to it and discuss it, providing examples from the schools we studied. These six issues have been contested in the field, and although we did not begin or carry out our study intending to focus on these issues, they emerged as central to our findings. Table 3 provides an overview of these six issues, along with ways in which they differed across instructional contexts. The six issues are: approaches to skill instruction, test preparation, connecting learnings, enabling strategies, conceptions of learning, and classroom organization.

Table 3. Issues of Concern and Overview of Findings

Issue	Beating the Odds Schools and Teachers	Typical Schools and Teachers
Approaches to skills instruction	Systematic use of separated, simulated, and integrated skills instruction	Instruction dominated by one approach (which varies among schools and teachers)
Test preparation	Integrated into ongoing goals, curriculum, and regular lessons	Allocated to test prep; separate from ongoing goals, curriculum, and instruction
Connecting learnings	Overt connections made among knowledge, skills, and ideas across lessons, classes and grades, and across in-school and out-of-school applications	Knowledge and skills within lessons, units, and curricula typically treated as discrete entities; connections left implicit even when they do occur
Enabling strategies	Overt teaching of strategies for planning, organizing, completing, and reflecting on content and activities.	Teaching of content or skills without overt attention to strategies for thinking and doing.
Conceptions of learning	When learning goal is met, teacher moves students beyond it to deeper understanding and generativity of ideas.	When learning goal is met, teacher moves on to unrelated activity with different goals/ content.
Classroom organization	Students work together to develop depth and complexity of understanding in interaction with others.	Students work alone, in groups, or with the teacher to get the work done, but do not engage in rich discussion of ideas.

Approaches to Skills Instruction

Throughout at least the 20th century, there has been an ongoing debate about the manner in which instruction is delivered, with some scholars positing the effectiveness of skills and concept learning through experience-based instruction (e.g., Dewey, 1938) and others stressing mastery of concepts and skills through decontextualized practice (e.g., Bloom, 1971). This has led to a pedagogical side-taking that continues today. For example Hirsch (1996) calls for students to remember culturally potent facts, and a new body of genre theorists (see Cope & Kalantzis, 1993) calls for teaching students the rules of organization underlying written forms, while Goodman and Wilde (1992) and Graves (1983) call for teaching skills and knowledge within the context of authentic literacy activities. Yet, studies of instructional practice across the century (see Langer

& Allington, 1992) indicate that teachers tend to blur distinctions, using what may appear to theorists as a fusion of theoretically dissimilar approaches. While this blending of instructional pproaches was apparent in all of the classes we studied, the ways in which the approaches were orchestrated differed considerably in the higher-achieving schools as compared with the more typical schools. Across sites, the instructional approaches followed three patterns that we have termed *separated*, *simulated*, and *integrated*, with different amounts and orchestrations of each in the higher-achieving and more typical schools.

Separated instruction is what most educators would consider to be direct instruction of isolated skills and knowledge. Often this takes place separately from the context of a larger activity, primarily as introduction, practice, or review. It can be recognized when the teacher tells students particular rules, conventions, or facts, or when instructional material focuses on listings of vocabulary, spelling, or rules. Sometimes this instruction is used as a way to "cover" the curriculum, other times as a way to help students understand and remember underlying conventions and to learn ways in which they are applied. Teachers use the *separated* activity as a way to highlight a particular skill, item or rule. It is a presented in a lesson that is generally not connected to what is occurring before or after it in class. It occurs, for example, when a teacher puts the distinctive features of a persuasive essay on the board and has the students discuss and try to remember them, perhaps by copying them into their language logs. It occurs when a set of roots are identified and defined. It is the teachers' way of drawing the students' attention to a skill, rule, or item of knowledge for available use in the language and literacy activities in which they engage. It is a lesson, exercise, or drill apart in time from larger units of meaning or use.

In comparison, *simulated* instruction involves the actual application of those concepts and rules within a targeted unit of reading, writing, or oral language. These are often exercises prepared by the teacher or found in teaching materials, where the students are expected to read or write short units of text with the primary purpose of practicing the skill or concept of focus. Previous reading, writing, and oral language work the students have done is often referred to during discussion of how that skill works in a larger activity, and what difference it makes in the quality of the presentation. Often students are asked to find examples of that skill in use in their literature and writing books, as well as in out-of-school activities. They sometimes practice it within the confines of small and limited tasks. I call it *simulated* because the tasks themselves are specially developed for the purpose of practice.

Integrated instruction takes place when students are expected to use their skills and knowledge within the embedded context of a large and purposeful activity, such as writing a letter, report, poem, or play for a particular goal (not merely to practice the skill) or planning, researching, writing, and editing a class newspaper. Here, the focus is on completing a project or activity well, with primary focus on the effectiveness of the work in light of its purpose. This is the time when the skill or knowledge is put to real use as a contributing factor in the success of the work. This becomes a time when the teacher might remind the students of a rule they learned during *separated* or *simulated* activities and how it might be useful in the completion of the activity at hand. If extra help is needed, it is provided by other students or the teacher.

Thus, the *separated*, *simulated*, and *integrated* activities all occur when needed within the ongoing instructional program. *Separated* and *simulated* activities serve as ways for students and teachers to "mark" the skill or item of knowledge for future use, while an *integrated* activity serves as useful application of a marked skill. Of course, a skill can become marked even during an integrated activity. Each approach serves its own function, but together they insure the students' growing control of the skills and knowledge that underlie efficient language and literacy use.

Findings indicate that these three kinds of instruction – separated, simulated, and integrated – are orchestrated differently in the higher performing as compared to more typical schools:

FINDING 1: In schools that beat the odds, effective learning and instruction of the knowledge and conventions of English and high literacy take place as "separated" and "simulated," as well as "integrated" experiences. In contrast, in more typically performing schools, although each approach might be used at some time, one or another instructional approach dominates.

As Table 4 indicates, in this study, teachers' approaches to skills instruction differed, with approximately three fourths of the more successful teachers in both beating the odds and typical schools using all three approaches. In comparison, only 20 percent of the more typical teachers in typical schools used all three approaches. While 50 percent of the typical teachers used separate skills instruction as their dominant approach, none of the more successful teachers did so. Furthermore, more successful teachers, as a group, relied on two dominant approaches, integrated a combination of all three, while the more typical teachers' approaches were more varied across

types of instruction. Analyses indicate that the more successful teachers used all three approaches with equal focus, or they used separated and simulated approaches but focused on integration a bit more.

Table 4: Approaches to Skills Instruction

	Percent of Teachers		
Dominant Approach	Beating the Odds Teachers in Beating the Odds Schools (N=18)	Beating the Odds Teachers in Typical Schools (N=4)	Typical Teachers in Typical Schools (N=10)
Separated			50%
Simulated			10%
Integrated	28%	25%	20%
All Three	72%	75%	20%

For example, in the higher performing schools, the skills and mechanics of English (grammar, usage, vocabulary) were taught within the context of literature and writing instruction, but there was often a great deal of separate and overt targeted instruction and review in the form of exercises and practice. Gail Slatko and Karis MacDonnell at Reuben Dario Middle School, for instance, had students check each others' grammar even when they didn't do peer revision. They, like most of the teachers in the high performing schools, also engaged in direct teaching of grammar and usage (e.g., sentence structure, punctuation), and used these lessons as models for their students to rely on when responding to each others' as well as their own work.

Karis used specific strategies to empower her students to be better writers, editors, graphic artists, and publishers. Chris Kirchner at Turner Tech was masterful at scaffolding her students' efforts to interpret the texts they read without sacrificing their learning of literary devices and other features, and she called herself the "Grammar Queen," using students' own writing as a jumping off place for inspecting how language works. The teachers also used the literature the students read as models for targeted conventions, language choices, literary concepts, and stylistic devices and made reverberating connections across activities. Grammar and conventions weren't ignored in the across the curriculum work they did: direct connections, reminders, and instruction were always present.

At Springfield High School, Celeste Rotondi and Suzanna Matton, both teachers who embedded skills and mechanics in long-range activities, always exposed their students to *separated* and *simulated* as well as *integrated* experiences and continually monitored their students' acquisition of new skills as well as noting where special help was needed. To help her students learn language and comprehension skills, Celeste selected difficult vocabulary words out of context and showed her students how those words could be used in class. She often did this as a *simulated* activity, in the context of the book they were reading, or to incorporate it into their writing practice. Using both *separated* and *simulated* lessons, she also helped her students learn to justify their answers, summarize information, and make connections. However, these new learnings were continually expected to be applied during *integrated* activities, such as literature circles.

Suzanna also used literature circles as activities that call for students' use of the skills and knowledge they were learning. For example, in one instance her students were divided into literature discussion groups and assigned the following roles that changed each week: discussion director, literary illuminary, vocabulary enricher, summarizer, and connector. Each student took responsibility for enriching the group discussion from the vantage point of the assigned role. Since these groups continued across the year, each student had many opportunities to practice the skills in context, and to see them modeled by the other students. When Suzanna saw that extra help was needed, she either helped the individual or offered a *separated* or *simulated* activity to several students or the entire class, depending on need.

In comparison, one teacher at Hayes High School, a more typical school, responded to the call for greater emphasis on grammar by raiding the book room for a classroom set of *Warriner's English Grammar and Composition*. She said,

> Well, this is how I do it (holding up the book). I work hard and have no time to read professional journals. I teach 5 periods and mark papers. I know I have to teach grammar. My students didn't get it before, so I have to teach it. So I use this (*Warriner's*) because it lays out the lessons, and my students can also use it as a reference.

Her skills lessons, through *Warriner's*, were primarily out of context, separate from the rest of her teaching.

Like the Hayes teacher, Carol McGuiness at Hendricks tended to maintain her "old ways" of teaching vocabulary, using a vocabulary workbook in which students did periodic assignments in

parsing words to get at Latin and Greek roots. Although she saw this as giving them a tool for encountering new words, a tool to learn how to learn, it was primarily a *separated* activity and we saw no evidence that she had students use these root word skills elsewhere.

Because Ron Soja, at Hayes, taught in the Humanitas program, which integrated social studies and contemporary English, he followed the themes called for by that program, and engaged his students in much reading and writing. However, he did not use these as a way to offer or make links among *separated*, *simulated* and *integrated* experiences. Instead, the skills and knowledge were used primarily within the context of the themed activities, with little direct attention to helping students focus on the development of their underlying literacy knowledge and skills.

Thus, while teachers in higher performing schools used a number of well-orchestrated instructional approaches to provide instruction and practice of targeted skills and knowledge in ways that suffused the students' English experiences, more typical schools' approaches to skills development seem to be more restricted and separated from the ongoing activities of the English classroom.

Approaches to Test Preparation

In recent years there has been a widespread call for systemic reform of schools and school systems (e.g., Brown, Campione, & O'Day, 1996; Smith & O'Day, 1991). One part of systemic reform requires that there be alignment between curriculum and assessment. In times such as these, with a widespread focus on achievement scores, how this is done becomes a critical issue. On the one hand, some educators focus primarily on practicing sample test items and helping students become "test wise"; they teach such test-taking skills as ways to select a best answer or how to best respond to a writing task from reading item. Others advocate teaching the needed literacy abilities throughout the year, as part of the regular grade-level curriculum. While in both cases test results are the focus; however, in the first case, improvement in test scores is the primary goal, while the second focuses on raising both test scores and student learning by improving the curriculum.

In this study, we found that while some test practice and test-taking hints were offered in both higher performing and more typical schools, reformulation of the curriculum in response to assessment demands was a pervasive feature only in the higher performing schools. Findings indicate qualitative differences in the ways in which test preparation is conceived and enacted in higher performing versus more typical schools.

FINDING 2: In schools that beat the odds, test preparation has been integrated into the ongoing class time, as part of the ongoing English language arts learning goals. In contrast, in the more typically performing schools, test prep is allocated its own space in class time, often before testing begins, apart from the rest of the year's work and goals.

Almost all the teachers we studied used both integrated and separated approaches to test preparation some of the time. However the dominant patterns of use varied considerably among the beating the odds and more typical teachers. As Table 5 indicates, more than three fourths of the more successful teachers in both kinds of schools integrated the skills and knowledge that was to be tested into the ongoing curriculum as their dominant approach to test preparation; the others used integrated and separated approaches equally. In comparison, 70 percent of the more typical teachers used a separated approach to test preparation, primarily teaching test preparation skills and knowledge apart from the ongoing curriculum. The more typical teachers who did not teach test preparation at all were not teaching students who were scheduled to take a high stakes test that year.

Table 5: Approaches to Test Preparation

	Percent of Teachers		
Dominant Approach	Beating the Odds Teachers in Beating the Odds Schools (N=18)	Beating the Odds Teachers in Typical Schools (N=4)	Typical Teachers in Typical Schools (N=10)
Integrated	83%	75%	
Separated			70%
Both	17%	25%	10%
None			20%

In higher performing schools, the primary approach to test preparation involved relevant teachers and administrators in a careful deconstruction and analysis of the test items themselves, which led to a deeper understanding of the skills, strategies, and knowledge needed for students to achieve the various levels of performance. This was followed by a review and revision of both the curriculum and instructional guidelines to ensure that the identified skills and knowledge were incorporated into the ongoing English program the students would experience. Before a test, the format was generally practiced to ensure students' familiarity with it. However, not much teaching time was devoted to this. It was the infusion of the needed skills and knowledge into the curriculum that seems to have made a difference. Students were also taught to become more reflective about their own reading and writing performance, sometimes using rubrics throughout the school year in order to help them gain insight into their better or less well developed reading and writing performance in response to particular tasks.

Kate McFadden-Midby and Myra Le Bendig at Foshay always strove to understand the test demands of Stanford 9 and help their students make connections between their ongoing curriculum and academic and real-life situations, including testing. For example, Kate collaborated with a group of teachers to design a series of lessons that would incorporate the skills tested by the Stanford 9 into their literature curriculum. They identified certain areas in which their students did least well (e.g., vocabulary, spelling, and reading comprehension) and planned lessons that would integrate their use in meaningful ways into the students' everyday experiences. They developed a series of eight lessons as models to be used with a variety of literature. These lessons served as ways for the teachers to create other opportunities to address areas of concern within the regular curriculum.

In higher performing schools, district-level coordinators often created working groups of teachers, and together, the coordinators and teachers collaboratively studied the demands of the high stakes tests their students were taking and used their test item analyses to rethink the curriculum, what to teach and when. For example, when the Florida Writes! test was instituted, the Dade County English language arts central office staff and some teachers met to study and understand the exam and the kinds of demands it made on students. Together, they developed an instructional strategy (grade by grade) that would create year-long experiences in the different types of writing, including the kinds of organization, elaboration, and polishing that were required. This coordination began some years before our study, and the instructional changes that

led to greater coherence were very evident in the classrooms we studied. All classes were replete with rich and demanding writing experiences, including direct instruction and help at all stages. In many classes, the teachers spent the first five or ten minutes of each period on an exercise assigned on the board for the students to begin alone or with others as they entered. Sometimes this involved doing analogies or writing their own, or reading a passage and developing multiple choice questions for others to answer (after studying how the questions were constructed). The student work was always discussed in class and connected to how it might be useful not only on a test, but for their own writing or reading. Connections were made to this activity later in the day, week or year.

Test preparation was a curriculum goal overtly planned by the teachers, and the students were reminded of it. For example, Turner Tech's Chris Kirchner said, "Last year my students did a lot with topic sentence and details, so this year I expect to see it in all the writing they do and I can work on other things on the Florida Writes!." Although the writing scores in some of the Dade County schools went up, the integrate attention to testing remained. During our two year study, the focus in Dade County shifted to improving reading scores, but the writing lessons remained. After studying the various kinds of reading tasks demanded by their high stakes tests and comparing it to their existing curriculum, the English language arts staff and teachers developed a new Comprehensive Reading Curriculum Guide. Once again they developed a series of lessons to infiltrate the year's curriculum at each grade level.

In some schools, teachers selectively used materials and created activities because they knew that their students needed to practice skills and knowledge that would be tapped by the test. For example, Suzanna Matton at Springfield High was constantly aware of enriching her students' vocabulary. She selected words she thought they would need to know, gave them practice, and followed with quizzes every six weeks. She also had her students do a great deal of analytic writing throughout the year, helping them become aware of strategic ways to write a well-developed analytic paper in response to the material they read as well as in response to writing prompts. For example, she helped her students trace how a conflict developed and was worked through in a story, and how allusion was used and to what affect, and then had them write about it, providing evidence. The students also learned to judge their own and others' writing and gained ability in a variety of writing modes.

In the more typically performing schools, the primary mode of test preparation offered practice on old editions of the test, teacher-made tests and practice materials, and, sometimes, commercial materials using similar formats and questions to the test-at-hand. In such cases, if test preparation occurred at all, there was a test-taking practice one or two weeks (or more) before the exam, or the preparation was sporadic and unconnected across longer periods of time. Although the Palm Middle School Improvement Plan called for 15 test-taking practice assignments to be given to the students across the curriculum during the course of the year, these assignments, if done at all, were most often inserted into the curriculum as additions rather than integrated. How to take a test, rather than how to gain and use the skills and knowledge tested, seemed to be the focus.

At Dove Middle School all students in the school, grades 6 through 8, were required to take California's statewide exam. Evangeline Turner, an excellent teacher whose students consistently scored better than those in other classes, was asked by the principal to give a booster course to 7th grade students who, with help, could most likely raise the scores of the school as a whole. Although the course was short in duration she focused on helping the students think strategically about how to take the exam and how to distinguish what she calls "on the surface and under the surface" questions. She also had them read books such as *The House on Mango Street*, discussing their understandings and writing about it in test-like ways. Although they were cram sessions, Evangeline tried to provide the students with ways to read, understand, and write in order to gain abilities that are marks of high literacy, not merely test-passing skills. Throughout the year, in her regular classes, Evangeline focused on the skills and competencies that are needed to do well on tests and to do well in English. In comparison, most of the other teachers at Dove focused on test prep one week before the test, using a test package provided by the principal.

Some teachers in typically performing schools seemed to blame the students, or the test, but not themselves. At Hayes, although the principal is a highly motivating personality and told the faculty, "We can do it," there was an underlying belief among the faculty with whom we interacted that the students were not capable of scoring well on the exam. They did not believe they could make a difference. For example, Ron Soja said, "They don't know anything. It's like they never did anything." Ron did not seem to feel personally accountable for ensuring his students possessed the underlying knowledge and skills to do well. He said,

> The Stanford test is not a good test to see whether they are achieving in school or not, because up until this year it hasn't meant anything. Half the kids, they think it's a big joke. . . .

Beginning two years hence, students in this district would need to achieve a certain percentile score (not yet determined) on the Stanford 9 test to be eligible for high school graduation. Ron rationalized that the students scored badly on the test because they did not take it seriously (did not understand its implications), rather than focusing on his efforts to prepare them for it. Because the school was on the critically low list, the principal wanted desperately for the scores to improve (with threat of receivership if they do not). Although she had a good relationship with the teachers (she is an ex-English teacher), she had neither championed nor orchestrated a coherent plan to improve the teachers' understanding of the test demands and align them with students' needs. Instead, more materials were purchased and some commercial staff development presentations (e.g., about writing across the curriculum) were purchased. But these were isolated attempts; an overall plan was not apparent. No teachers ever mentioned the staff development to us, and we found the English department chair returning new materials because no one wanted to use them. The principal had tried to institute sustained silent reading during home room but had not yet been able to convince the teachers to accept the 15-minute lengthening of the home room period that change would require. At Hayes, the teachers had not been involved in identifying their students' needs (or their own), nor had a professional discussion started about the overall changes needed.

Like Ron, Carol McGuiness at Hendricks did not take personal responsibility for improving the test scores of her students, nor was she sure of the relationship between her teaching and their test scores. She said,

> I don't know if what I am doing in my classroom is making them better able to handle these tests, but I'm hoping it will make them better equipped to handle the really hard choices they come up against in life.

In Carol's district, the alignment between student needs, curriculum, and assessment was being addressed, but neither she nor her department chair were able to translate the district goals into classroom practice. Even though their school was one of the lowest performing schools in the district, the language arts chair said of his department, "We don't meet unless we have to meet. This is not my administrative style. I just put things in their mailboxes."

Practice activities are often developed by states and districts or commercial material developers but not meant to be the sole activity schools use to help students do well. To prepare for the New York State English Regents Exam, which all students must pass to graduate, New Westford High School, a more typically performing school, sent two teachers to a state education department meeting designed to brief them on grading procedures. They, in turn, transmitted what they had learned to their colleagues. The English language arts district supervisor bought sets of guide booklets for Regents practice, and Elaine Dinardi bought yet another for additional practice. The books present Regents Exam-like activities for the students to practice. The department faculty also made up grade-level take-home finals that followed the Regents format. Elaine interspersed these practice activities around her usual curriculum until some time in April, when she began to stress Regents practice in her class. This practice became the major class activity, in effect became the curriculum, for the entire quarter, in preparation for the June exam. Over this time, the practice, focused on the kinds of essays the test would require: writing for information, compare and contrast, and critical lens (relating a quote to a work that was read), presented in the form required by the test. It should be noted that this was the first year that the English Regents Exam was mandated for all students. In prior years, the school's percentage of students passing (based on average grade enrollment) was at or below 50 percent. Consequently, district educators were very apprehensive about the Regents. Like Hayes, teachers in New Westford did not believe the average student had the capability to perform well on the test.

Administrators of other typically performing schools sometimes purchased professional services or programs that were not integrated into the ongoing program. For example, at Hendricks, an outside consultant was hired to give test-taking strategy workshops to 10th grade students to help improve their scores. The pre-packaged materials exhibited little understanding of the specific test or the needs of the students.

While most of the more typically performing schools in our study had developed School Improvement Plans, they had been conceived and put into place as separate, as opposed to conceptually coherent, experiences for students, offering such additions as pull out programs, tutorials, packaged computer assisted programs, and other pre-designed instructional programs that did not necessarily connect to overarching curricular goals and ongoing classroom experiences. Nor had there been an effort to selectively use these instructional additions to support greater unity across students' English language arts experiences.

Overall, higher performing schools seem to focus on students' learning, using the tests to be certain the skills and knowledge that are tested are being learned within the framework of improved language arts instruction, while the more typical schools seem to focus on the tests themselves, with raising test scores, rather than students' literacy learning, as the primary goal.

Connecting Learnings

The education literature on learning and instruction is replete with evidence that student learning and recall are more likely to be enhanced when connections can be made to prior knowledge gained from both in- and out-of-school experiences than when the content of instruction is treated as if it is entirely new (see for example, Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Brown & Campione, 1996). Well-developed developed knowledge is also linked around important concepts and its relevance to other concepts is well understood. Although many curriculum guides as well as scope and sequence charts have attempted to depict links among specific learnings within and across the grades, too often the connections have been implicit at best, and often in the mind of the teacher or curriculum developer rather than shared with the students (see Applebee, 1996).

Findings from this study indicate that connectedness is a pervasive goal of the teachers and administrators in the higher performing schools we studied as opposed to those in the more typical schools.

FINDING 3: In the English programs of schools that beat the odds, overt connections are constantly made among knowledge, skills, and ideas across lessons, classes, and grades as well as across in-school and out-of-school applications. In contrast, in the more typically performing schools, connections are more often unspoken or implicit, if they occur at all. More often the lessons, units, and curricula are treated as disconnected entities.

As Table 6 indicates, at least 89 percent of the more successful teachers in both types of schools tended to make all three types of connections with approximately equal focus. In comparison, the more typical teachers tended to make no connections at all, and when they did, it tended to be "real world" connections between school and home. None of the more typical teachers emphasized all three types of connections.

Table 6: Connecting Learnings

	Percent of Teachers		
Dominant Approaches Used	Beating the Odds Teachers in Beating the Odds Schools (N=18)	Beating the Odds Teachers in Typical Schools (N=4)	Typical Teachers in Typical Schools (N=10)
Within lessons			20%
Across lessons	11%		
In and out of school			30%
All three connections	89%	100%	
No connections			50%

In the higher performing schools, the teachers worked consciously to weave a web of connections. Thus, at Springfield High School, Suzanna Rotundi planned her lessons with consideration to the ways in which they connected with each other, with test demands, and with the students' growing knowledge. For example, when discussing her goals for the reading of *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, she said,

> My primary goal is to provide them with what I consider a challenging piece of literature that will give them an excellent resource for the AP exam. It fits in well with the works we have studied in that it explores the inner consciousness and makes use of a recurring image/symbol that has been the key to several other literary works . . . that of blindness. It allows them to explore the way a symbol can convey meaning in several literary works. Personally, I feel that Ellison's is a monumental literary work. The ramifications in terms of social psychology with the concept of invisibility applies to so many different life experiences. I try to open the students' appreciation of how this work relates to their own world and it introduces them to the question of identity and how the daily interactions are crucial to identity formation. . . .

Thus, her lessons connected texts, tests, and life.

Tawanda Richardson, a teacher at Drew Middle School, is a literacy coach; coaches are hired by the district to work with teachers, to suggest, demonstrate, and share ideas for improved instruction. The coaching program develops a mentoring relationship matching highly successful teachers with new ones in ways that can effect professional growth and increase student performance. It invites teachers into a system-wide support network. Although Tawanda was familiar with the districtwide curriculum, she felt she also needed to understand the particular

teacher and class with whom she would work. To do this, she observed, gathered data about the class, and tried to understand the student and teacher needs. She then set up goals with the teacher and demonstrated lessons for professional development – goals and strategies that met the students' needs but were intrinsically connected to the larger curriculum.

Even in hectic times when the teachers felt the burden of many demands on their instructional time, those in the higher performing schools and the excellent ones in the more typical schools still tried to weave even unexpected intrusions into more integrated experiences for their students. For example, when his long-range plans were disrupted, Shawn DeKnight, an excellent teacher in a lower performing school, did what he called "curricular improvising." He said, "If it's possible to bend the disruption so it fits in some way with my instructional plans, then I feel I have triumphed." When a grade-wide project was a field trip to a senior citizens center, his theme was "An Inter-Generational Forum: Senior Citizens and Teens Discuss What it Means to be Liberal or Conservative." He had planned to teach his students to write character analyses, based on their class readings. He decided to use the visit to the senior citizens home as a starter; interviewing the seniors "would force my students to interact with the seniors," he said. But what to do with the interviews? He asked them to write a character sketch. He explained,

> The writing follows a similar format to a persuasive essay, something my kids worked on a couple of months ago. It will also be a nice segue into the character analysis in the sense that both types of writing establish a thesis that a person has a certain character trait, then goes on to provide specific evidence to support the thesis. For the character sketch, the evidence that a person was liberal or conservative or moderate would come from the interviews. With the character analysis, which we will begin in a couple of weeks when we finish *Romeo and Juliet*, the evidence comes from things the character has said or done in the play.

Shawn made connections such as these throughout each day, week, and year, pointing them out to his students so they could recognize ways in which their skills and knowledge were productively used in a range of situations.

Springfield High School, a higher performing school that was preparing for accreditation, was in the process of revising its mission and approaches to education. Self-study led the teachers to develop a more integrated approach to learning, fostering connections both within school and between school and community. One part of the mission statement focuses on students as effective communicators. Faculty were collaboratively working on teams to ensure that the skills needed for effective communication would be taught and reinforced across the

grades and across the curriculum. This process was followed for the other components of the school's mission as well, and these were coordinated with the statewide standards. The teachers are aware of making these connections. For example, Celeste Rotondi said,

> Standards, as much as they're a kind of pain in the butt when we have these meetings and align the standards and all that stuff, it has helped me. . . . My curriculum is strong. But once I started really looking at the standards I realized I didn't have a lot of oral writing activities, and so it kind of helped me to conceptualize that a little better and forced me to incorporate that.

It never occurred to Celeste to simply add a few oral activities to her lesson plans. Instead, she rethought ways in which reading, writing, and oral language could be interrelated across the curriculum and across the year in ways that would strengthen her students' oral as well as written communication abilities.

In addition to connectedness of goals, skills, and experiences across the day and year (connections Celeste would plan and make overt to her students when appropriate), she also wanted to ensure that her students could learn to make connections across the literature they were reading as well as connections from literature to life. She wanted her students to learn to read the text and the world. To do this, Celeste organized her literature instruction around thematic units, for example pairing *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Raisin in the Sun* to permit her students to focus on family relationships and ways families deal with the situations they face. For such units, she typically created study guides that provided scaffolding for her students and made overt to both her students and herself the particular connections that were at focus. Comparisons across the pieces helped her students compare and critique aspects of structure, language, and style while they also focused on thematic elements across the pieces and connected (e.g., compared and critiqued) them based on related situations in the world today.

As contrast, in the more typical schools, even when the lessons were integrated within a unit, there was little interweaving across lessons; there were few overt connections made among the content, knowledge (literary or otherwise), and skills that were being taught. Class lessons were often treated as separate wholes – with a particular focus introduced, practiced, discussed, and then put aside. For example, at Hayes High School, Ron Soja said that in his year-long plans, he moved the students from more subjective to more objective writing tasks. However, we saw no indication he shared this distinction with his students or helped them make other connections among the kinds of writing he assigned.

At Crestwood Middle School, another more typical school, Monica Matthews often had her students write about the literature they had read. However, the connections among the students' own writing and the works they had read were not explicitly made, nor did she help her students make connections between the literature they read and the larger world.

At Stockton Middle School, Helen Ross asked questions that encouraged her students to make connections, but because discussions were carefully controlled, the connections the students would make were predetermined. For example when they read *The Diary of Anne Frank* in play form, taking turns reading parts, she asked, "These are real people your age. How would you react in that situation?" "What would you do?" Although these seem open ended, she was actually leading in a particular direction, toward the diary. She steered the discussion with questions and comments until a student came forth with the idea she sought. Then she said, "Her diary. That's how she escapes," marking the conclusion of that day's discussion.

This same pattern of questioning can also be seen in Carol McGuiness' class, at Hendricks High School, as she opened the discussion after reading a chapter of *Anpao: An American Indian Odyssey*.

T: In the Judeo-Christian tradition, do we have animals that converse with God?

S1: No.

T: Only one, and which one is that?

S2: The snake.

T: The snake. Representative of ------ ?

SSS: Satan.

T: Right. Satan. In this case the animals are benevolent. They are not evil. How is humanity according to this legend?

Rather than encouraging her students to make their own connections, or showing them how, Carol guided them to guess the connection she has made. Following this very short pseudo-discussion, Carol had the students sequence 24 events that she had taken from the first chapters of the text. This sequencing activity was disconnected from the discussion that had preceded it and was followed by another disconnected activity the next day, when she planned to have them act out a scene from the text.

The lack of connectedness in the classrooms of Helen and Carol was also reflected in the larger curriculum across the grades; their departments did not foster connectedness. For example,

in Helen's district, department chairs in the middle and high schools were eliminated a few years ago in favor of a K-12 English Language Arts Coordinator for the district's schools. He had been trying to foster curriculum coherence and continuity through cross-grade dialogue and within-grade curriculum coordination; however, because of his many responsibilities, he had difficulty accomplishing all his goals. As he told us, "Too many buildings, too many kids, too many teachers. I just can't do what I want anywhere. So I do what I can. You have to keep your sights limited to what you can do." He had begun to make a difference, with some teachers working to create connections in their curriculum and instruction, but he had not yet managed to transform the approaches of whole departments.

Although the central office in Carol's district was making monumental efforts to make the language arts program more cohesive, her department chair at Hendricks made little effort to follow through with his teachers. He said that although he gets good ideas and materials from the central office, he just puts the packages in the teachers' mailboxes instead of meeting, discussing, planning, and collaboratively developing ways to incorporate the ideas into the curriculum.

A lack of connection was also found in the other more typical schools. For example, in selecting materials and planning lessons an overall plan connecting the parts was often absent. And when workshops and materials had been selected, their relationship to the whole program was overlooked. For example, Palm Middle School hired a private company to provide workshops designed to help teachers do student-centered learning. However, there was no attempt to integrate the company's pre-designed program with the new English language arts curriculum, or with any other ongoing aspect of the school's program.

In the more typical schools, when educators gain information from professional encounters, or adopt pre-developed programs or commercial materials, they seem not to use them in the full and integrated ways in ways in which they were intended. Connie McGee, an English Language Arts Supervisor for the Miami/Dade County Schools, calls it the "Key Lime Pie syndrome." She said that even though a set of activities has been planned, demonstrated, and explained within a particular rationale and sequence, with features that build on each other, some teachers choose only the parts that appeal to them. Connie says, "I show them how to make the whole pie, but they make just the meringue or just the filling and wonder why it doesn't taste like key lime pie." The resulting failure of the activities is then blamed on the poor "recipe" or the poor students rather than lack of a coordinated whole.

Enabling Strategies

During the past 25 or more years, a sizable research literature has emphasized the contribution of students' strategic awareness to learning and performance and the importance of teaching students strategies for carrying out reading, writing, and thinking tasks (e.g., Hillocks, 1995; Paris, Wasik & Turner, 1991; Pressley et al., 1994). It is important for students to learn not only content, but also intentional ways of thinking and doing. In response, instructional approaches have been developed to help students become aware not only of the content but also of the particular tasks. While the fields of science and mathematics have always seemed to be natural environments for teaching strategic approaches that enhance student performance (e.g., the scientific method, steps to mathematical solutions), teaching strategies and helping students to be strategic in the ways in which they approach a task (e.g., process approaches to writing, reflective literacy, or reciprocal teaching) are newer to the English language arts.

In our study, we found there are explicit differences in ways in which teachers in the higher performing as compared with more typical schools teach students strategies that will enable them to successfully engage in activities on their own and to reflect on and monitor their own performance.

FINDING 4: In schools that beat the odds in English language arts classes, students are overtly taught strategies for thinking as well as doing. In contrast, in more typically performing schools, the focus is on the content or skill, without overtly teaching the overarching strategies for planning, organizing, completing, or reflecting on the content or activity.

As Table 7 indicates, there were distinct differences in ways the more and less successful teachers approached the teaching of strategies. All of the more successful teachers overtly taught their students strategies for organizing their thoughts and completing tasks, while only 20 percent of the more typical teachers did so. The other 80 percent of the more typical teachers left such strategies implicit.

Table 7: Enabling Strategies

	Percent of Teachers		
Dominant Approach	Beating the Odds Teachers in Beating the Odds Schools (N=18)	Beating the Odds Teachers in Typical Schools (N=4)	Typical Teachers in Typical Schools (N=10)
Overtly taught	100%	100%	20%
Left implicit			80%

In the higher performing schools, the teachers segmented new or difficult tasks, providing their students with guides for ways to accomplish them. However, the help they offered was not merely procedural; rather it was designed so that the students would understand how to do well. Sometimes the teachers provided models and lists, and sometimes evaluation rubrics. Strategies for how to do the task as well as how to think about the task were discussed and modeled, and reminder sheets were developed for student use. These strategies provided the students with ways to work through the tasks themselves, helping them to understand and meet their demands. For instance, at Hudson Middle School, Cathy Starr taught her students strategies to use to reflect on their progress as they moved through an activity. After a research activity, the students were to rate themselves on their research and writing using rubrics they had developed:

1. Where do you think you fall for the research [grade yourself]? Did you spend the time trying to find the information? Did you keep going until you had learned enough to write your report?
2. Whether this is a short and informal or longer and more formal piece, you should spend time thinking about the writing. Did you plan what you were going to say? Did you think about it? Did you review it and revise it before putting it in the back?
3. Did you edit? Did you check the spelling and punctuation?

Most of the teachers in the higher performing schools shared and discussed with students rubrics for evaluating performance; they also incorporated them into their ongoing instructional activities as a way to help their students develop an understanding of the components that contribute to a higher score (more complete, more elaborated, more highly organized response). Use of the rubrics also helped students develop reflection and repair strategies relevant to their reading, writing, and oral presentation activities.

Alicia Alliston, a teacher at Drew Middle School, provided her students with strategies for making entries into their Reader's Journal. First, they learned that the Journal had several parts: the heading with the title and author, an entry number, an illustration relevant to that week's section of reading, a quick summary, an overall response/reaction to the reading (with a writing aid, if needed ("The most _____ part of the reading was_____ because . . ." "The part of the story or character that caught my attention was _____ because . . ."), and other possible sections (triggered memory, prediction, advice, evaluation). Written responses were required to be a minimum of two pages, and when the task was new, Alicia provided the students with a pre-formatted form to use as a guide. She also provided them with suggestions and tips about what to include in their response, such as what a reaction should include, how to highlight an interesting passage and selectively discuss its features, and questions to consider. She also offered starters for them to use when stumped (I wonder . . ., I noticed . . ., I felt . . .). When they did creative writing, she gave students sheets with format and purpose suggestions to consider such as providing advice, diary entry, or poetry. She also provided starters or models, and gave them suggestions for the kinds of illustrations they might choose, such as a hand drawn picture, cutout from a magazine or newspaper, or computer graphic.

Kate McFadden-Midby at Foshay also provided her students with strategies for completing a task well if she though it was going to be new or challenging. For example, when her students were learning to do character analyses and to understand differing perspectives, she asked them to begin by developing a critical thinking question and then to choose two characters from the book (or books) they had read, in order to compare the characters' viewpoints on that question. The critical thinking questions needed to be ones that anyone could discuss even if they had not read the book (e.g., one student asked, "Why are people so cruel when it comes to revenge?"). Before they met in groups, she provided this outline: 1) share your critical thinking question with your group; 2) tell your group partners why you chose that particular question and what situation in the book made you think about it; and, 3) tell which two characters you have chosen to discuss that question in a mini-play. The students engaged in deep and substantive discussion about their classmates' questions, because Kate's strategy list had helped them gain clarity on the goals and process of the task. Discussions were followed, the next day, by a pre-writing activity in preparation for writing a description of the characters they chose. Kate instructed them on how to develop a T Chart on which one character's name is placed at the top of one column of the T and

the other character at the other side. She told them to list characteristics: what their characters were like, experiences they had, opinions, etc. She provided them with strategies to identify characteristics and then ways to compare them across the two characters.

This was followed by group sharing, where the students presented their characters. Here, Kate scaffolded the students' thinking by asking questions about the characters: What kind of person was the mother? What are some adjectives that might describe her? How do you think those things could influence how she feels? Over time, when the students had been helped, through a variety of supportive strategies, to develop deeper understandings of their characters, they were then helped to write a mini-play depicting those same characters involved in the issue raised by their critical thinking question. Although this was a highly complex activity, the students were provided with supportive strategies along the way, gaining insight not merely into the characters themselves, but into ways they could understand characters and differing perspectives when reading and writing on their own.

In the more typical schools, instruction focused on the content or the skill, but not necessarily on providing students with procedural or metacognitive strategies. For example, in the sequencing activity in Carol McGuiness' 10th grade class at Hendricks mentioned earlier, two of the three groups of students were having some difficulty putting the 24 events in sequence. Rather than eliciting any strategies that might be useful, Carol simply told them,

> OK. Divide your slips into thirds. OK? This is research. Start with the beginning, the middle, and the end and put the strips into three different piles. Get this done and you'll have a method.

But her guidance did not help the students understand the concept of sequencing any better, nor what it meant to create temporal order from story. Only one group of students seemed to understand what she meant and completed the task. So although Carol wanted her students to practice the skill of sequencing, she provided them with little guidance for doing so, either with her help or on their own.

The English chair at one of the more typically performing schools, speaking about his teachers in general said, "Incorporating strategies is difficult for most of us because it's hard for us to pull ourselves out of our comfort range. You know, unless we're prepared to teach the strategy, we're inclined to do something the old way." In contrast, Evangeline Turner, an excellent teacher in another typically performing school (Drew Middle School), always taught

her students strategies and reminded them to use them throughout the year. For example, she gave her students rubrics for how to make and judge an oral presentation, to think, reach interpretations, and then to justify their responses. She helped them learn to think metacognitively and to explain their ideas. Jonathan Luther, a newer teacher, had been teaching to the test throughout the year, with a primary focus on form (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, structure); however, he had come to realize that empowering his students with strategies would contribute more toward improving both their literacy development and their test scores. He began working with Evangeline to do this. Strategy instruction has yet to be picked up by other teachers, although Evangeline is the department chair and trying to help them do so.

Conceptions of Learning

What counts as knowing has become a much-used phrase in the educational literature. It is often used as way to make distinctions among educators who focus on facts and concepts and those who focus on students' abilities to think about and use new knowledge. At one time a student's ability to give definitions, select right answers, and fill deleted information into sentences and charts was considered evidence of learning. But at least two bodies of research changed that: one focused on disciplinary initiation, where the goal became to help students learn to more and more approximate expert thinking in particular fields, such as thinking like an historian (e.g., Bazerman, 1981); and the other, on critical thinking, where the focus was on higher levels of cognitive manipulation of the material (e.g., Langer & Applebee, 1987; Schallert, 1976). More recently the issue has turned to engagement (Guthrie & Alverman, 1999). Here concern goes beyond time on task to student involvement with the material. Although all three bodies of work have had an affect on literacy pedagogy, the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (1998) reports that fewer than seven percent of students in grades 4, 8, and 12 perform at the "advanced" level, the highest of four possible achievement levels in reading. This level represents students' grade-appropriate ability to deal analytically with challenging subject matter and to apply this knowledge to real world situations.

Findings from our study suggest that there are distinct differences in teachers' conceptions of learning in the higher performing versus more typical schools.

FINDING 5: In schools that beat the odds, the tenor of the instructional environment is such that, even after student achievement goals are met, English language arts teachers move beyond those immediate goals toward deeper understandings and generativity of ideas. In contrast, in the more typically performing schools, once students exhibit use of the immediate understandings or skills at focus, teachers move on to another lesson.

As Table 8 indicates, the unusually successful and the more typical teachers' approaches to student learning were decidedly different. All of the more successful teachers took a generative approach to student learning, going beyond students' acquisition of the skills or knowledge to engaging them in deeper understandings. In comparison, all of the more typical teachers moved on to other goals and activities once they had evidence the target skills or knowledge had been learned.

Table 8: Conceptions of Learning

	Percent of Teachers		
Dominant Approach	Beating the Odds Teachers in Beating the Odds Schools (N=18)	Beating the Odds Teachers in Typical Schools (N=4)	Typical Teachers in Typical Schools (N=10)
Focus on immediate goal			100%
Focus on deeper understanding	100%	100%	

For example, in Myra LeBendig's class at Foshay, both students and teacher expected their lessons to be highly thought provoking and generative. When studying *The Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, Myra often asked her students to think about the character's situation and the various attitudes and ethics it portrayed. After the more obvious themes in the text were discussed, together they explored the text from many points of view, both from within the text and from life. But they didn't stop there. Myra then helped her students discuss ideas and issues about their own ethnicity that were generated by the text. As part of the cultural knowledge generated during these lessons, the discussion was interlaced with references both teacher and students made to famous people (e.g., Malcolm X, W.E.B. Du Bois) and other works that students might be interested in reading. In Myra's class, ideas begat ideas and discussion and led to deeper understandings of the text as well as life.

Alicia Alliston at Drew Middle School never stopped her literature lessons when she was confident her students had understood the book and developed their own defensible interpretations. Once arriving at this level of expertise, she provided an array of activities that provoked her students to think and learn more. For example when her students were reading and writing about *The Midwife's Apprentice* by Karen Cushman, they also discussed the history, life, and art of the Renaissance. They did research into the life and social patterns of the period and ended with a Renaissance Faire. Celeste Rotondi, at Springfield High School, had her students work in literature circles where they discussed both the commonalities and differences in the books they read. Literature circle time was her students' opportunity to go beyond the texts they were reading, as more mature discussants and critics. One literature circle involved students in reading the following teacher-selected books: *The Great Gatsby*; *Bless Me, Ultima*; *Slaughterhouse Five*; and *Always Running*. At the end of the cycle of discussions the students wrote and performed songs about the books and their deeper meanings and created CD cases with fictional song titles, covers, and artists. The class also read *Night* by Elie Weisel. To prepare for it, Alicia had her students look at photos from concentration camps and write down words and phrases that were relevant. These were used to create poems. While reading *Night*, the class visited the Museum of Tolerance, completed an assignment while they were there, and wrote letters from three points of view (seven to choose from), all involved with the Holocaust in some way. Thus, the reading of *Night* became not merely an understanding and critique of the work itself (though this was done), but rather an integrated opportunity to contemplate historical, ethical, political, and personal issues raised by the reading.

Gloria Rosso at Hudson Middle School wanted to teach her students research skills using the World Wide Web, hard copy material, and interviews as sources of information. To do this, she engaged her students in a generative activity that would extend their learning of content as well as of the research process. She began with what she called a mini-unit on the students' surnames – what they meant and their histories – leading to essay writing, the development of coats of arms, and class presentations. In addition to teaching students to access data on geneologies on the Web, she also taught them to develop good questions for interviews with family members, and how to read materials and take notes and citations. They were invited to explore the use of symbols, as used in coats of arms, as a background to devising their own. While Gloria helped with the research skills, the students discussed what they were learning and ways in which the

histories of their names provided a living trail of history. This led into her next and more extensive research unit on African Americans, where once again, the students not only did research and wrote papers but interacted around the larger implications of the stories of African American experiences and present day life.

In contrast, in the more typical schools, the learning activity and the thinking about it seemed to stop with the responses sought or the assigned task completed – at a level Vygotsky (1987) calls "pseudo concepts," in which the learning is more a superficial recall of names, definitions, and facts than a deeper and more highly conceptualized learning.

For example, when Jack Foley's class at New Westford High read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, he asked questions about the content and vocabulary. He called on students to provide the answers and when they did, he either added additional comments to their responses or moved on to the next question. Neither the text nor the students' responses were used during the discussion to generate historical, social, or other connections and elaborations.

At Hayes High School, after reading *Romeo and Juliet*, Ron Soja gave his students the following issues and asked them to select the one they most "leaned" toward: Romeo and Juliet are victims of fate, Romeo and Juliet are victims of the society, or Romeo and Juliet are victims of their own passions. The next day they discussed their selections and reasons, then Ron went on to the next topic.

At Hendricks High School, Carol McGuiness ends her lessons when her students provide the answer she is after. Using the example of the sequencing activity again, as soon as the first group finished, Carol asked them to read the strips in sequence. Then the activity was over, even though the other groups were in the midst of struggling with the task. No connection was made either to the chapter as a whole or to the forthcoming chapter, nor to sequencing itself as a sometimes useful skill. Even the fact that the teacher was willing to end the task before all but one group had finished was evidence of the lack of value that was attributed to it as a thought-provoking learning experience. Similarly, when her students study verb tenses, they are given a homework sheet that is a continuation of what they were doing in class. It is more of the same, rather than a generative activity that builds upon the new knowledge.

Thus, in the higher performing schools, students are constantly encouraged to go beyond the basic learning experiences in challenging and enriching ways. In contrast, students in the more typical schools have few opportunities for more creative and critical experiences.

Classroom Organization

In recent years, a variety of approaches to classroom organization have been proposed to provide students with more opportunities to learn through substantive interaction with one another as well as with the teacher. These approaches include collaborative (Barnes, 1976) and cooperative groups (Slavin, 1996), literature clubs (Raphael & McMahon, 1994), peer writing groups (Graves, 1983), and envisionment-building classrooms (Langer, 1995). These and other similar approaches have been developed in response to both theory and research from a sociocognitive orientation that sees interactive working groups around shared problems to be supportive environments for learning. Bakhtin's (1981) notions of heteroglossia (see also Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997) suggests that all learning is dialogic, reliant on and gaining meaning from the many past and present relevant voices. In dialogic groups students bring their personal, cultural, and academic knowledge to the interaction as they play the multiple roles of learners, teachers, and inquirers and in thus doing have an opportunity to consider the issue at hand from multiple perspectives. Students can interact as both problem-generators and problem-solvers. New ideas can be entertained and new ways of thinking modeled as more and less expert knowers of the content and those more and less familiar with the task share expertise, provide feedback, and learn from each other. Such contexts emphasize shared cognition, in which the varied contributions of the participants allow the group to achieve more than individuals could on their own. However, several studies have indicated that such groupings are not pervasive in American schools (NAEP, 1998; Applebee, 1993; Nystrand, Gamoran, & Heck, 1992). Findings from the present study suggest that even when students meet in groups, there are qualitative differences between how they are used by teachers and enacted by students in the higher performing versus more typical schools.

FINDING 6: In schools that beat the odds, English learning and high literacy (the content as well as the skills) are treated as social activity, with depth and complexity of understanding and proficiency with conventions growing from interaction with present and imagined others. In contrast, in the more typically performing schools, students tend to work alone or interact with the teacher. When group work occurs, the activity focuses on answering questions rather than engaging in substantive discussion from multiple perspectives.

As Table 9 indicates, the dominant classroom interaction patterns differed sharply in the more and less successful classrooms. In the higher performing schools, at least 94 percent of the teachers helped students engage in the thoughtful dialogue we call shared cognition. Teachers expected their students to not merely work together, but to sharpen their understandings with, against, and from each other. In comparison, teachers in the more typical classes focused on individual thinking. Even when their students worked together, the thinking was parallel as opposed to dialogic.

Table 9: Classroom Organization

	Percent of Teachers		
Dominant Approach	Beating the Odds Teachers in Beating the Odds Schools (N=18)	Beating the Odds Teachers in Typical Schools (N=4)	Typical Teachers in Typical Schools (N=10)
Shared cognition	94%	100%	10%
Individual thinking	6%		100%

In the classes of the higher performing schools, students not only worked together in physical proximity, but they gained skill in sharing ideas, reacting to each other, testing out ideas and arguments, and contributing to the intellectual tenor of the class. They engaged in the kind of teamwork that is now so highly prized in business and industry although sometimes suspect in school settings where solitary work is still too often prized.

All the classes at International High School, including Marsha Slater's, work collaboratively. In Marsha's class, from the first days of school and throughout the year, students are taught to work together, discussing issues and reacting to each others' ideas even as they are gaining a common language through which to communicate. (All students at International are recent immigrants.) During one of the first few weeks of school, Marsha introduced a literature research and writing activity that required group work throughout. The students divided into groups and started planning their strategy. We saw a similar pattern in science, where the students were graphing and mapping on computer the results of their group-accomplished experiments. It is part of the educational philosophy of the school that "The most successful educational programs are those that emphasize high expectations coupled with effective support systems; individuals learn best from each other in collaborative groupings." Throughout our

study, Marsha's emphasis was on collaborative and active learning. Activity guides helped the students in a group work together toward a common goal, but debriefing sessions and conferences provided a time for each student to discuss not only the group's work but also to describe her or his own areas of accomplishment and need. In all the higher performing schools, such collaborative activities were common. Students worked together to develop the best thinking or best paper (or other product) they collectively could; they helped and learned within the same activity as in life.

In the higher performing schools, even whole class activities, particularly discussion, were used to foster similar cognitive collaborations. At Foshay, although her students sometimes worked in groups, Myra LeBendig often favored whole class discussions. She used discussion as a time for exchanging ideas and stimulating thought, exploration, and explanation. As a whole class, her students were taught to work together, listening to and interacting with one another about the ideas at hand. For example, throughout one whole-class discussion about *The Invisible Man*, her students raised ideas and freely engaged in literary dialogue. One student brought up the issue of how race was treated in the book, and another the symbolism of blindness as ignorance (as portrayed in the book), of not being able to see. One student said he thought Dr. Bledsoe had self-hatred, in response to which a classmate said she didn't think it was self-hatred, but that he [Bledsoe] didn't know where he fit in and didn't know how to connect his two cultural parts. "He hasn't found himself. He's in-between." This generated a discussion that continued for half an hour, with the students in deep discussion about their interpretations of the text and its connection to social issues of identity. Myra explained that she uses such discussions to help students "work through their evolving understandings, ideas, and opinions that will change as they continue reading the book." She explained that early in the year she told her students, "Fight to teach me," meaning she wanted them to disagree with her (and each other) and extend her (and their) thinking with their comments. This is exactly what they did in class discussion.

At the same school Kate McFadden-Midby's classes often worked in collaborative groups. Group Share was a common activity during which students came up with interesting questions about what they were reading for the group to consider and discuss. When it was group time, the students immediately began interacting in productive ways. They knew what to do and were eager to interact. Kate explained that early in the school year she told students about her

expectations, time management, and ways in which their thinking was valued. Her goal was to have her students truly share ideas and stimulate each other's thinking by engaging in real conversations. We have already seen how she orchestrated such activities, in the example of her lessons on character analysis presented in the section on strategy instruction. In that example, the students worked together to sharpen their individual and collective understandings of characters in books they had read, even though they had read different books. In turn, the understandings that emerged from those discussions helped the students to develop rich characters in plays of their own. Throughout, they were absorbed in discussion and thought.

Cathy Starr, at Hudson Middle School, used both whole class and small group activities; they wove into one another and together supported students' developing thinking. For, example, in response to reading assignments, she asked her students to bring three thought-provoking questions to class to stimulate discussion. Students met in groups to discuss these questions and come up with one or two "big" questions for the entire class to discuss. Cathy moved from group to group, modeling questions and comments, and provoking deeper discussion and analysis. After the whole class discussion, Cathy listed on the board items on which the students had agreed as well as issues that still needed to be resolved. In both small groups and whole class discussions, the students needed to interact in thoughtful ways; the social activity was critical to moving their understandings forward and doing well. These discussions were interspersed with assignments the students were to complete in groups. For example, while reading *The Giver*, she gave the following assignment:

> Group Task 1 - Government [this is one of a set of four]
>
> Form a group of no less than three and no more than 5 students to complete this task.
>
> Review the chapters we have read. Design a chart that illustrates how the government for this community functions. Include all information you can find about who makes the decisions and who has power in the community. Include the roles of the individuals in this structure.

This task required the students nor merely to locate information, but to discuss and refine what they meant by government and how it functions in the story, as well as the implicit roles the various characters serve. Some of the teachers in this study called such working groups "mind to mind," stressing the thoughtfulness they expected.

In classes in the more typical schools, such collaborative work rarely took place. For example, Monica Matthews at Crestwood Middle School explained that she has tried to have her students work in groups, but "they're unruly." She had them work together in groups minimally "because they talk off task." The occasional times when her students did group work, Monica expected them to turn in individual papers. Thus, their cognitive interaction about ideas was minimal, and their focus was on completing tasks on their own.

This same notion was echoed by Elba Rosales at Hendricks High School. She "saved" group work for the honors and AP classes, claiming that the regular students require more lecture and don't handle group work well. Often the group work that was assigned to what she considers her higher functioning classes required the students to work independently to complete their part of a task, then put the pieces together as final product. For example, after reading *Animal Farm*, each group was to create an Animal Farm Newspaper. However, each group member selected a segment (e.g., obituary, horoscope, cartoon, editorial) and completed it as homework; then the pieces were assembled into a four-page newspaper. While the group effort could be said to reflect what happens at a real news office, the students missed opportunities to work through ideas together for each of the components that was incorporated into the final product.

In other classes, group work often took place, but the students didn't "chew ideas" together, nor challenge each other intellectually. They cooperated in completing the task but didn't work conceptualizations through. For example, when Jack Foley's students at New Westford High School worked together doing study guides, they kept the guides in front of them, moving from item to item down the page. As one student called out the answer, the others wrote it onto their worksheets, and together they moved on to the next question.

Thus, there is an essential difference in the way social activity is carried on in the higher performing and more typical schools, with the higher performing teachers treating students as members of dynamic learning communities that rely on social and cognitive interactions to support learning. In contrast, the more typical teachers in more typical schools tend to treat each learner as an individual, with the assumption that interaction will either diminish the thinking or

disrupt the discipline. However, since the schools in this study had similar student bodies, it became evident that the students were more actively engaged in their school work more of the time when English and literacy were treated as social activity.

Discussion

This study of higher and more typically achieving schools in three states identified the following distinguishing features of effective instruction:

1) skills and knowledge are taught in multiple types of lessons,
2) tests are deconstructed to inform curriculum and instruction,
3) within curriculum and instruction, connections are made across content and structure to ensure coherence,
4) strategies for thinking and doing are emphasized,
5) generative learning is encouraged, and
6) classrooms are organized to foster collaboration and cogitation.

These features dominated the higher achieving English and language arts programs. In contrast, some aspects of these features were present in some of the more typical schools some of the time and other features none of the time. It is the "whole cloth" environment, the multilayered contribution of the full set of these features to the teaching and learning interactions, that distinguished the higher achieving programs from the others. These features are obviously related to teachers' visions of what counts as knowing and the goals of instruction that guide the teaching and learning process. They shaped the educational experiences of students and teachers in the high performing schools we studied. All the teachers with whom we worked were aware of concerns about test scores and students' acquisition of skills. Yet in the most successful schools, there was always a belief in students' abilities to be able and enthusiastic learners; they believed all students can learn and that they, as teachers, could make a difference. They therefore took on the hard job of providing rich and challenging instructional contexts in which important discussions about English, language, literature, and writing in all its forms could take place, while using both the direct instruction and contextualized experiences their students' needed for

skills and knowledge development. Weaving a web of integrated and interconnected experiences, they ensured that their students would develop the pervasive as well as internalized learning of knowledge, skills, and strategies to use on their own as more mature and more highly literate individuals at school as well as at home and in their future work.

These findings cut across high-poverty areas in inner cities as well as middle class suburban communities. They occurred in schools that were scoring higher in English and literacy than other schools serving comparable populations of students. They involved concentrated efforts on the part of teachers to offer extremely well-conceived and well-delivered instruction based on identified goals about what is important to be learned, and on an essential understanding of how the particular knowledge and skills identified as learning goals occur and are used in the carrying out of real literacy activities. From these teachers, we have learned that it is not enough to teach to the test, to add additional tutoring sessions or mandated summer school classes, or to add test prep units or extra workbooks on grammar or literary concepts. While many forms of additional and targeted help were evident as parts of the effort to improve student achievement in the higher performing schools, these alone were not enough. The overriding contributor to success was the whole-scale attention to students' higher literacy needs and development throughout the curriculum, which shaped what students experienced on a day-to-day basis in their regular classrooms. Such revisioning of both curriculum and instruction requires a careful rethinking of the skills and knowledge that need to be learned, their integration for students' use in broader activities, and continued practice, discussion, and review of them as needed over time. The English and literacy learning goals, at once recognizable and overt, can then permeate a range of direct literacy and literacy-embedded activities. They are at the heart of the kind of English teaching and learning across the grades I discussed in the introduction to this paper, and underlie the development of the higher literacy and deeper knowledge this entails. Thus, the findings provide us with not merely a vision, but also a set of principles and an array of examples to use as guides in revisioning effective instruction.

It is important to emphasize that in the higher performing schools, the six features worked in conjunction with one another to form a supportive web of related learning. It would be erroneous to assume that the adoption of any one feature, however well orchestrated, without the others could make the broad-based impact needed to effect major change in student learning. Rather, it was the suffusion of the school environment with related and important learnings that were

highlighted by the teachers and recognized by the students as making a difference. My earlier paper (Langer, 1999) dealt with the principle-led creation of professional contexts in schools that beat the odds; this paper adds that next critical dimension, principle-led practice.

We have begun gathering similar data from 12 middle and high school classrooms in one more state (Texas). We will use these data to continue to test our findings about the six features of effective instruction. We will also focus on some of the specific knowledge and skills that comprise English and describe some trade-offs that occur when one route rather than another is taken. We hope this series of reports, along with the case studies of the particular sites, will be helpful to educators in making decisions about effective paths toward the improvement of student achievement.

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APPENDIX 1

THE SCHOOLS

Following is a brief description of each school and its relevant context; case studies have been written for each; those published are available from the National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement. A list is included in Appendix 2.

An asterisk (*) denotes use of the actual name of the school and its community.

Florida, Miami-Dade County

Miami-Dade County has a long-lived reputation for involvement in state-of-the-art efforts to gain knowledge and enhance student performance in English and literacy, including the College Board's Pacesetter program, the New Standards Project, the Dade County Writing Institute, The Dade County English Association, and professional development for all teachers in the education of English language learners. The county-wide English language arts specialists keep up with the latest research and reform efforts as well as concerns, and involve the teachers with whom they work in ongoing professional development through open discussion and exchange of both ideas and approaches. The teachers in each of our six participating schools worked closely with the central office supervisors, collaborating toward change both at the school and district levels.

Reuben Dario Middle School.* Reuben Dario serves a poor population; approximately 80% of the students receive free or reduced lunch. Of the 2083 students who attend the school, 83% are of Latino descent, and 14.5% are designated as Limited English Proficient. The school's poverty rate is one and a half times greater than the statewide average. It operates at 119% capacity, and its absentee rate is below the statewide average. Following district goals, it maintains a diverse full time staff: 51% Hispanic, 23% Black non-Hispanic, and 21% White non-Hispanic. Although it was chartered as a Title One school in 1989, Reuben Dario's scores on the annual Florida Writes! exam have steadily improved, with performance above the statewide standard. Florida's standard for grade 8 requires at least 50% of students to score a 3 or higher on a scale of 0 to 6. In 1997, 86% of Reuben Dario's students did so.

Highland Oaks Middle School.* Highland Oaks is located in a neighborhood of recent and rapid change. Unlike its past student body, White students are now in the minority; 47% of the students are designated as White non-Hispanic, 23% African-American non-Hispanic, 27% Hispanic, and 3% other (Asian, Indian, or multiracial). Many are poor, with 33% of the students eligible for free or reduced lunch. Of the full-time staff, 28% are African American and 13% Hispanic. With a 1732-student enrollment, the school operates at 128% capacity. Teachers and administrators are working extremely hard to maintain student achievement, even as the student body changes. Their effort is paying off. The students have scored above the statewide standard on the Florida Writes! exam, with 80% scoring a 3 or higher. The state standard is 50%.

Palm Middle School. Palm, built in the 1950s, is in a poor residential area of small bungalows. The school is of concrete block construction with steel shuttered windows. A barbed wire fence is meant to keep intruders out. Home-school relations are good, and parents frequently volunteer in and visit the school as well as patrol the school grounds when it is not in session. The school is a Media Arts Magnet, with a strong architectural and design focus that attracts out-of-area students. Of the 1500 students, 86% receive free lunch. The school's mission is "to expose our students to technology enriched learning experiences while providing a supportive, structured learning environment." The school has not thus far

involved itself in district-wide curriculum and professional development efforts. Although there is extraordinary enthusiasm and administrative support for the prize winning band and sports teams, this is less the case for academics. It is one of the lowest performing middle schools in Dade County.

Hendricks High School. Hendricks, originally built in a middle class area, is now in a federally designated empowerment zone. It houses the largest public housing population in the area, primarily with first and second generation immigrants. The school, built in 1925, houses 2800 students. Its sports program is well known, and many trophies line the halls. Hendricks is an International, Business and Finance Magnet School, and is known for its Arts and Drafting program. There is also a Pivot Program for potential drop-outs, and an active Jr. ROTC program. All programs lead to an academic diploma. Its School Improvement Plan addresses the need for reading improvement and calls for implementation of the new District curriculum, as well as staff development. It is one of the more typical schools in the study.

Miami Edison Senior High School.* Edison is the oldest school in the county, with a poor and transient student body. It is in a particularly high crime portion of Miami. Thirty eight percent of the students are designated to receive free or reduced lunch. Serving 2340 students, it operates at 116% capacity. A large number of students (92%) are African American, primarily of Haitian descent; 25% have been designated as Limited English Proficient. Faculty and administrators maintain high academic goals for students and have been working to improve achievement. In 1997 the school scored above the statewide competency, with 71% of the students scoring above a 3 on the Florida Writes! exam. Although it has a history of low scores, the two teachers participating in the study were highly successful with their students. School-wide scores, however, continue to remain comparable to other schools with similar demographics. It is trying to change, and most recently has undergone organizational restructuring through the institution of academies.

William H. Turner Technical High School.* Turner Tech is an alternative school of choice, with a student population of 2119. Sixty three percent of the students are of African American, non-Hispanic heritage, 33% Hispanic, and 4% White non-Hispanic. Forty five percent of the students are listed as eligible for free or reduced lunch, and approximately 6% have been identified as Limited English Proficient. It is a "two for one" school, offering a combined academic and vocational program whose goal is to prepare students to excel in their goals, be they higher education or the workforce. It is a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools and seeks to develop the "habits of mind" advocated by Sizer (1992). Although there are no academic requirements for admission to the school, the attendance and academic standards are high; students are put on probation if they do not maintain good attendance and/or if they earn two or more Ds on a report card. In 1997, 90% of the students scored 3 or higher on the Florida Writes! exam, with an average score of 3.6. Not only do Turner Tech's students continue to surpass state standards, but they are closing the gap with more middle class schools in the state. In 1997, for example, 78% of the graduating class went on to some form of higher education.

New York

Henry O. Hudson Middle School. Hudson is a middle school in a middle class community, a few miles outside of a medium-sized city. Its students consistently score above the statewide norm; in 1997 for example, 97% of the students scored above the state standard on the statewide test of English reading effectiveness, in comparison to 82% statewide. It consistently scores higher than comparable schools, according to state records. Although 90% of the student population is White, with no more than two or three students of color in each class, mainstreaming has added another kind of diversity, with special education and physically handicapped students in every classroom. Academic achievement is a high priority at Hudson, and teachers and administrators work collaboratively to maintain and extend

excellence. Its teachers and administrators keep up with the latest research, discuss it based on their needs, and share what works. They remain active in their profession.

Stockton Middle School. Stockton is situated in a once middle class family neighborhood that has experienced a steady decline as homes were bought as rental property and crime inched its way in. Stockton had been a high school until the early 1990s when the district underwent a major reconfiguration to be more cost efficient and to achieve better integration across its student population. Of Stockton's present enrollment, 23% of the students are African American, 14% Hispanic, and 1% Asian; 22% are designated as special education students. Forty six percent of the students are eligible for free lunch, with an additional 30% eligible for reduced lunch. In recent years there has been a strong district-wide move to improve student achievement, with many new efforts underway at all levels. In turn, Stockton has been experiencing rising scores on state tests. Stockton also boasts the largest school orchestra in the district, exceeding even the high school. Musical events and a winning basketball team draw the community to the school on a consistent basis.

Abraham S. King Middle School. King is located on the outskirts of New York City. It is in a poor area, with 40% of its students eligible for free or reduced lunch. It is smaller than the other schools already introduced, with a student body of 890. It has a diverse population, with 33% of the student body of Hispanic heritage, 21% African American, 43% White, and 3% other. Despite its high poverty and diversity, 89% of the students scored above the statewide reference point on an English language arts assessment, in comparison to 82% statewide. The school was recently named a Blue Ribbon School for helping students reach high standards. The district has a reputation for innovative programs to engage students and support higher performance. We studied the voluntary two-way bilingual program designed to help monolingual English speaking students learn Spanish and their monolingual Spanish speaking grade-mates learn English. Language proficiency is the goal across the curriculum. The program was initially funded by the state and has been held up as an example of innovative language instruction and high literacy achievement.

Crestwood Middle School. Crestwood is the lowest performing middle school in its district. It is a Title I School with 62% of its 650 students receiving free or reduced lunch. Sixty six percent of the students are categorized as White, 25% African American, 5% Hispanic and 4% Asian. Crestwood's reading scores declined over time with 72% scoring above the state's reference point the last time the PEP (Pupil Evaluation Program) test was given. Changes are underway to improve student achievement. The principal is new, as is one-third of the teaching staff. Involuntary transfers account for some of the change. Overall, complaints among faculty are many and morale is low. School safety has been an issue and security has been tightened. The out-of-school suspension rate is 38.5%, compared to a rate of 18% in similar schools.

International High School.* International is a highly innovative school located in a busy commercial area of New York City. Although it is a school of choice, it is limited to students who have been in the United Stated for four years or less and have scores below the 21st percentile on the Language Assessment Battery. It offers a complete high school education through a content-based English as a second language approach. In 1987, the 450-student body came from 48 countries and spoke 37 languages. Although the school does not administer the statewide achievement tests, it is known for its remarkable achievement record; more than 90 percent of its students go onto college and have done so throughout its history. The school is affiliated with many educational reform projects that have high aspirations for students, including Opportunity to Learn, Center for Collaborative Education, Arts Connection, Coalition for Essential Schools, and New Visions for Public Schools.

New Westford High School. New Westford is a small city high school on the edges of an affluent suburb in a community that has undergone change since the 1970s, when it had a large industrial base and a stable, and economically varied population. In response to dramatic cuts to the industrial work force, many executives, managers, and skilled workers left the area. Stores are now closed, and the

community is poor and run down. Approximately 36% of New Westford's 2000 students receive free or reduced lunch; 7.7% are English Language Learners. Changes are beginning. The city community is trying to redevelop its downtown area. The school district, once one of the top city schools in the area, is trying to raise student performance. The administration had been top-down, seeking little input from teachers, and approaches to curriculum and instruction remained relatively unexamined. Attempts toward improvement have focused on literacy instruction in the primary grades and technology across the grades, with the possibility of building on New Westford's strength and making it a Fine Arts Magnet for the area. Despite the approach of a new English Regents Exam as of 1999, which must be passed by all students who wish to earn a high school diploma, little professional development or organizational or curricular rethinking have taken place.

Tawasentha High School. Tawasentha is located at the outskirts of a small and poor industrial city that had thrived at the turn of the century, but lost business, industry and jobs as technology changed production. The district had been quite traditional, marked by low test scores and low goals. Approximately 11% of the 900 students are designated as eligible for free or reduced lunch. Ninety seven percent of the student body are White, with fewer than 10% designated as Limited English Proficient. We chose to study Tawasentha as a contrast because it is a school in change. Along with a new and highly motivated superintendent of schools and a small but changing parent community, academic goals and hence instructional programs are changing. In the past, Tawasentha had consistently scored lower than comparable schools on the statewide tests. However, this had begun to change at the elementary level, the grades initially involved in major reform. When we began our study, such changes had not yet occurred at the high school, but were about to.

California

Rita Dove Middle School. Dove is in an economically depressed area far from the city center. Although it follows the open walkway architectural style of many warm weather localities, the school is fenced; even the food service is gated and students served their meals through a small opening. Dove, with 1650 students, is presently in state receivership based on low scores, which must be raised . The principal and teachers are anxious to raise scores; extra tutorial sessions before the regular school day and a variety of extra help for students and workshops for teachers have been put into place. One teacher participating in the study is a highly experienced master teacher whose students have consistently scored higher than their classmates. The second teacher is newer and motivated to excel.

Charles Drew Middle School. Drew is a 60-year-old school with over 2000 students and a good reputation for student success and commitment to the school. It follows a school-based management model, and prides itself as a friendly working community. It is part of a UCLA network, thus teachers are involved in ongoing professional interactions with the University.

Foshay Learning Center.* Foshay is a K-12 school that has undergone major reform. Before principal Howard Lapin took the helm, it had been a low performing and run down school. Within five years, it has attained national recognition as a successful learning environment. The entire school has an academic focus and has affiliated with the University of Southern California in a Neighborhood Academic Achievement Program, spearheaded by Dr. James Fleming, designed to offer an academically oriented college preparation program for students in the USC community. It is a New American School and an Urban Learning Center school, a model for transforming urban schools.

Rutherford B. Hayes High School. Hayes is a large inner city school, 80 years old, in a high poverty area. It serves almost 3200 students, 76% of whom are on free or reduced lunch. It is a school slated to go into receivership next year due to the numbers of students failing to pass the statewide exam;

it must raise scores by 2% in order to continue its present administration and programming. It is a Math and Science Magnet and offers the Humanitas Program that integrates English and Social Studies with a focus on global cooperation.

Springfield High School. Springfield is an urban school with an enrollment of 2300 and a warm and friendly campus environment. It has a good reputation and strong community support. It has the backing of local agencies, including Creative Artists, and the students are engaged in many performing arts activities. It is has a Foreign Language/International Studies Magnet and a Bilingual Business and Finance Academy, both which offer college courses for credit. Springfield is a member of the UCLA collaborative, designed to enrich teachers' knowledge and students' abilities to enter college with greater preparation. A Saturday program offers job skills as well as opportunities for students to make up academic credit.

APPENDIX 2:
Related Reports and Case Studies from the Excellence in English Research Project

12002 *Excellence in English in Middle and High School: How Teachers' Professional Lives Support Student Achievement.* Judith A. Langer.

The following site-specific case studies profile teachers, teams of teachers, and central office administrators.

12003 *Interactions between Central Office Language Arts Administrators and Exemplary English Teachers, and the Impact on Student Performance.* Carla Confer. (Miami-Dade County).

12004 *Beating the Odds Over Time: One District's Perspective.* Sallie Snyder. (Miami-Dade County).

12005 *A Middle School Teacher Never Stops Learning: The Case of Cathy Starr.* Eija Rougle. (Hudson Middle School).

12006 *Vocational School Teacher Engages Students in High Levels of Reading and Writing: The Case of Janas Masztal.* Steven Ostrowski. (Turner Technical High School).

12008 *Collegial Support and Networks Invigorate Teaching: The Case of Marsha S. Slater.* Ester Helmar-Salasoo with Sally Kahr. (International High School).

Other case studies will be available in 2000:

Interdisciplinary Cluster as Professional Network: Three Middle School Teachers in a Two-Way Bilingual Program. Gladys Cruz. (King Middle School).

Achieving High Quality Reading and Writing in an Urban Middle School: The Case of Gail Slatko. Tanya Manning. (Reuben Dario Middle School).

English Instruction in the Classrooms of Four Exemplary Teachers. Steven Ostrowski. (Highland Oaks Middle School and Turner Technical High School).

Forging Connections to Advance Literacy in the Middle School: The Case of Rita Gold. Steven Ostrowski. (Highland Oaks Middle School).

Teaming to Teach English to International High School Students: A Case Study. Paola Bonissone. (International High School).

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